The History and Associations of the Belfast Charitable Society

By R. W. M. STRAIN, B.Sc., M.D., F.R.C.P.I.
Physician to the Society

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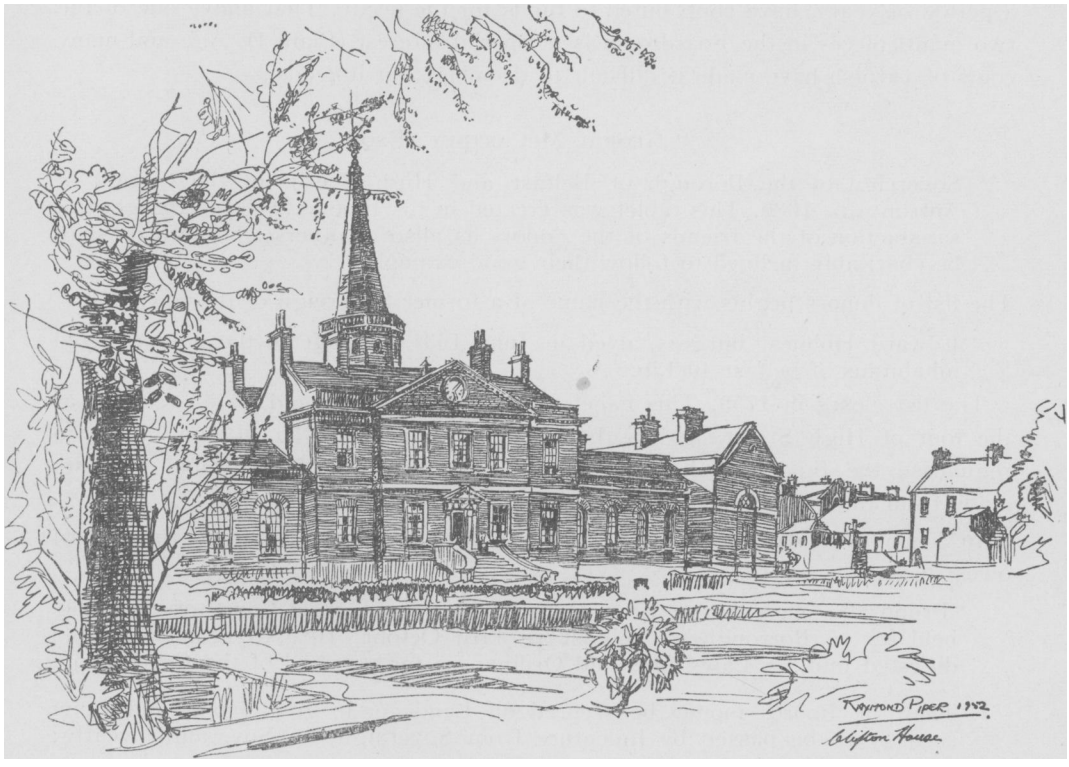

THE Belfast Charitable Society is Belfast's oldest charitable foundation, and Clifton House is the oldest public building in the city still substantially in its original state.

Its history is interesting, because it is in essence the history of the evolution of Belfast over the last two centuries. The original intention of the founders was to build a poorhouse and hospital. Once this was accomplished, they had to undertake many additional tasks which would otherwise have remained undone, for local government as it is understood to-day was largely ineffective.

Then, during the Industrial Revolution, the population of Belfast increased very rapidly, and at the same time there was a general awakening of the public conscience to the fact that most of these people lived a wretched and precarious life. Under these two powerful stimuli other organisations appeared, both civic and philanthropic, on which devolved the many former duties of the Charitable Society, until to-day its sole responsibility, though one of its original ones, is the care of the aged and infirm.

The Original Charity Fund of Belfast.

From the moment he enters the front hall, no visitor to Clifton House can fail to remark the numerous wall panels inscribed with the names of those who, over a period of years, have contributed to funds for the needy. That above one of the two mantlepieces in the Boardroom is of special interest (Plate 1). Age and many coats of varnish have made it difficult to decipher, but it reads :—

> "George McCartney, Esqr.,
>
> Sovereign of the Borough of Belfast and High Sheriff of the County of Antrim A.D. 1680. This tablet was erected in his time as well for the general satisfaction of the friends of the donors as allso of others who hath or shall be charitably inclined to follow their good examples."

The list of donors begins with the name of a former Sovereign of the town :—

> "Edward Holmes, burgess, dyed in June 1631 and left to the poor decayed inhabitans of belfast 40 Lib."

The list closes in 1759. This panel formerly hung in the old Parish Church at the foot of High Street, and is the tangible evidence of an attempt made to regularise the funds which had collected as the result of charitable bequests made from time to time.

In Young's Town Book of Belfast the minute is quoted to which this Board owes its existence :—

> "Proposalls made to ye Soveraigne & Burgesses at a Court of Assembly held for ye Borrough of Bellfast ye 14th Octobr. 1680 to be debated and digested into By Laws Acts and Ordinances for ye good of the Corporacon.
>
> 1. That the Poores money be secured on Lands or in good hands and suffct security to be passed by Indenture from Soveraigne to Soveraigne yearly; and the Table where ye benefactors for ye poore are incerted may be fairly drawne over and the Earle of Donegall's name may be entered in Lettrs of Gould with the sume blanke in its collume till ye 200 li left by his will be paid for ye use of the said poore and allsoe ye names of all other persons with their sumes may be entered that have given that others when they see what is left and soe well secured may be induced to ffollow their good example for ye good of the decayed Inhabitants of this Corporacon.
>
> agreed on & to be don accordingly."

Until two hundred years ago this appears to have been the only organised charity in the town.

A Poorhouse and Hospital.

In the middle of the 18th century Belfast was a borough of some 8,500 inhabitants. From maps and illustrations of the time, it is possible to form some idea of the sort of place it was. High Street was the principal thoroughfare. The Farset river ran its open course down the lower part of the street, and sailing ships, their Masters living in Skipper Lane near by, could come up the river to take on or discharge cargo by the quayside. The Market House stood where Montague Burton's shop is now, and the Donegall Arms, where many of the early meetings of the founders of the Society were held, was on the opposite side of the road. These premises were reconstructed in 1786, and are actually part of John Robb's buildings to-day. The old Corporation Church at the foot of High Street, where St. George's Church is now, was small and falling into ruins. Dr. Pocock, afterwards Bishop of Ossary, passed through the place in 1752, and wrote :—

> "The town . . . consists of one long broad street and of several lanes in which the working people live. The Church seems to be an old tower or castle to which they have built so as to make it a Greek cross."

A plan (Plate 2) shows the principal streets. High Street was continued into the country as Mill Street and Barrack Street. Ann Street, then called Bridge Street, marked the south side of the town. North Street and Donegall Street, which was then called the New or Linenhall Street, both ran from Waring Street at the "Four Corners" to the Peter's Hill-Carrickfergus Road. Hercules Lane joined the top of High Street to North Street, and was not to become Royal Avenue until much more recent times. John Street connected this point with Linenhall Street.

On the corner of North Street and John Street stood the George Inn. Here, on Friday, 28th August, 1752, Margetson Saunders, the Sovereign, and some of the residents of Belfast met (Plate 3)

> "to consider of a proper way to raise a sum for building a poor House & Hospital & a new Church in or near the Town of Belfast."

There is evidently nothing new about financing an Irish hospital by means of a sweepstake, for it was

> "Resolved, that 100,000 tickets be issued, at half a guinea each, the chances thereof to depend upon the drawing of the Dublin lottery now depending."

Some of these tickets are still extant. This proved a bad means of raising money, and at a further meeting it was decided to take over another series of tickets in a State lottery in London. Accordingly, a notice appeared in the "Belfast News-Letter" of 6th July, 1753 :—

> "Belfast Charitable Scheme.
>
> Whereas a Poorhouse and Hospital are greatly wanted in the Town of Belfast for the support of vast numbers of real objects of charity in this Parish, for the employment of idle beggars that crowd to it from all parts of the North, and for the reception of infirm and diseased poor; and whereas the Church of Belfast is old and ruinous and not large enough to contain the Parishioners,

and to rebuild and enlarge the same would be an expense grevous and insupportable by the ordinary method of public cesses. Now, in order to raise a sum of money to carry these good works into execution, the following scheme hath been approved of by the principal inhabitants of said town and gentlemen of fortune in the neighbourhood who are desirous to promote so valuable an undertaking."

After this follows an outline of the new lottery scheme. In London, in the open market and in the coffee houses, the Belfast tickets which had been grafted on to the British State Lottery were not easily sold, and even in Belfast there was great difficulty in getting cash from those who had contracted to take tickets. The very characters of those managing the Scheme did not escape public criticism. A deputation was sent to London that winter to see what could be done. After about a month the deputation returned home, having made some £500 for the fund.

By annual lotteries and other means, the money collected only very slowly, but at length, on Thursday, 17th January, 1767, there was a meeting of the Members of the Belfast Charitable Scheme in the Donegall Arms, at which it was

"Unanimously Resolved

That the Sum of Sixteen hundred & fourteen pounds two Shillings and four pence half penny, which appears to be the amount of the Fund at Christmas, one thousand seven hundred & sixty six, or what other sum shall arise from the same, be applied to the building of a Poor House and Hospital, agreeable to the original Intention of the Scheme, on such Ground as Lord Donegall shall be pleased to grant for that purpose, in the Town of Belfast —And that the same shall be proceeded upon as soon as his Lordship's Pleasure shall be known.

Resolved

That it is the opinion of this Board that the Ground on the North West side of the Road leading to Carrickfergus fronting the New Street is the most convenient Place for erecting the intended Buildings, and where they will be most ornamental to the Town of Belfast.

And it is the desire of this Board, That Mr. Saurin should acquaint Lord Donegall with their Sentiments, and that they request his Lordship to have the ground for the intended Buildings set apart as soon as can be conveniently done; for it will be impossible to begin them so early as Spring, 1768 unless clay be thrown up immediately for making Bricks the ensuing Summer, and it is expected that proper Clay will be found upon the Spot."

In July of that year

"His Lordship was pleased to approve of the same, & to be desirous to concur in the proper measures to carry them into execution."

At a meeting in the New Sugar House Office it is

"Resolved that it would be very useful and proper to have a new iron chest for the use of the Society imported from Holland"

to hold the assets of the consolidated fund and all the documents that are now fast collecting. The cost is to be £8. 17s. 6d. There is one of these so-called Spanish Armada Chests preserved in the building still (Plate 4), but it is not

three-locked, as the one from Holland was reported to be, and inside the lid on the elaborate grill protecting the mechanism of the lock there is inscribed,

"*Wolffgang Abraham Otto in Nurnberg fecit.*"

This is more probably the original old chest, though it may be the new one, for with the addition of two padlocks, for which there are fasteners, it could be unlocked only with three separate keys, each in the possession of one of the specially appointed Key Carriers. One of these carriers is to be Henry Joy, and the chest is to be kept in his house.

There is a feeling that a new phase has opened. Funds and a site have been procured. Plans are under consideration. The old minute book is abandoned when only half used, and a new one is begun. Water is brought from Daniel Blow's field. Lime is purchased nearby. Mr. John Kennedy allows the lighters "Polly" and "Crab" to carry away sand and stones from his estate at Cultra free of charge. Sand is also fetched from the bank of the Lagan opposite Crummock. Bricks, as it was hoped, are being made on the spot. Stone comes from Whitehaven and Ballycastle, slates from Wales and the Highlands, timber from the Baltic.

At last (Plate 5 (a)), in 1771, on 1st August,

"being a day memorable for many glorious events to these nations,"

the foundation stone was laid by Stewart Banks, the Sovereign of the town. His portrait, in the uniform of the Volunteers, still exists (Plate 6 (a)). In the words of an inscription on copper placed within it,

This Foundation Stone
of a
Poor House and Infirmary
for the Benefit of
The Poor Sick of the Town and Parish of
Belfast
was laid
On the first day of August, A.D. MDCCLXXI
And in the 11th year of the Reign of
His Majesty George III.

The Right Honourable
Arthur, Earl of Donegall,
and the
Principal Inhabitants of Belfast,
Founded this Charity
And His Lordship granted to it,
in Perpetuity
Eight Acres of Land,
on part of which this Building
is Erected.

The laying of this stone was destined to be the beginning of more than the mere fabric of the building. There is no record of the usual collection of representative objects being placed inside the stone, but five golden guineas were put on top of it for the benefit of the workmen.

Arthur Chichester, 5th Earl and 1st Marquis of Donegall (Plate 6 (b), whose name is remembered in the designation of many parts of Belfast, made himself financially responsible for the new Church of St. Anne, which was built in 1777 on the site now occupied by the Cathedral. The bell from the old Church was hung in the tower of the new Poorhouse and Infirmary, and can be seen to-day suspended in a massive wooden frame in the entrance hall of the institution (Plate 4 (a)). The bell is dated 1731, and is decorated on the outside with a raised ornamental band. It is still of beautiful tone, and can be rung by an inside tongue.

The Society soon sought statutory powers to enable it to carry out certain of its self-appointed tasks. In the Irish Parliament in 1773 legislation was passed to amend

> "An Act for Badging such Poor as shall be found unable to support themselves by Labour, and otherwise providing for them; and for restraining such as shall be found able to support themselves by Labour and Industry, from begging."
>
> "Whereas," says the new Act, "a number of young and able bodied persons follow the several occupations of news-crying, cleaning shoes, and carrying baskets from the market, and are, in the intervals of such employment exposed to idleness and vice; and whereas such persons might more usefully be engaged in labour, and such employments might be executed by persons partially disabled, who must otherwise be taken into the house of industry; be it enacted . . . that any person following any of the said occupations in the county of the city of Dublin . . . without a licence . . . shall be deemed an idle person, and be liable to commitment as a vagabond."

There is a familiar ring about the phrase "persons partially disabled," for legislation on their employment is not new.

The Act continues:—

> "and whereas the Town of Belfast in the County of Antrim is a populous and wealthy town, and the said town and parish thereof contains as many inhabitants as several of the cities or counties of towns in the Kingdom, but, not being a county within itself, cannot have the benefit of the said law in as ample and full a manner as is found necessary; and whereas the inhabitants of the said town and parish of Belfast have by voluntary subscriptions and contribution . . . erected a poorhouse and infirmary for the reception of the . . . poor and of sick persons . . . and the said inhabitants are desirous . . . that a body corporate should be formed, and to continue for ever, for the better carrying into execution under proper regulations the charitable and humane design of maintaining the poor of the said town and parish . . . be it enacted . . . that from and after the first day of June, one thousand seven hundred and seventy-four, the right honourable Arthur Earl of Donegall. James Lewis, the Sovereign of the said town of Belfast," . . . with others . . . "be called and distinguished by the name of the President and Assistants of the Belfast Charitable Society . . . It shall and may be lawful for the said President and Assistants to make such and the like Byelaws and

Regulations . . . with respect to the poor and all idle and sturdy beggars . . . as the Corporations created by virtue of the said Act within counties at large, and counties of towns and cities are enabled to do."

Thus, from its earliest days, this Society, at all times a voluntary organisation, sought and undertook responsibilities that would have fallen to the local authorities, had Belfast then been a city or county borough, and acted, in fact, almost as the governing body of the town. An Assistant was, and still is, anyone subscribing one guinea or more annually to the Society.

When the House was first opened for inmates in 1774 (Plate 5 (b)), the accommodation was :—

7 beds for the sick
4 double beds for sturdy beggars
22 double beds for the poor
4 single beds for vagrants.

These seven beds for the sick mark the beginning of Belfast's hospitals. At a meeting in the Market House in September of that year it had been

"Resolved—That said seven Beds be fitted up immediately under the direction of the Faculty if they will be kind enough to give us their assistance."

Here are the instructions for the preparation of the first of these beds :—

"Resolved immediately to have one sick bed made in the following form : 4 posts 5 feet 10 inches high—3 : 3 wide—6-3 long—a curtain at the Back and Foot to run on Rods—corded with fir ropes—A straw Matt—A Bed of fine sacking twilled and filled with cut straw — Two single sheets — a single blanket, and a carpet for upper cover—The under Edge of the Bed side is to be 12 Inches above the floor."

These beds were in the North Eastern part of the building, but there is no record of which room or rooms were used for the purpose. There is a note that

"The Gentlemen of the Faculty of Physicians & Surgeons have generously resolved to attend the Sick Patients Gratis,"

and inside the front cover of the Minute Book started in 1774 there is this list :—

"Physicians in order of rotation :—

Dr. Seeds
Dr. Haliday
Dr. Mattear
Dr. Apsley
Dr. White
Dr. Stephenson
Dr. Moor
Dr. McDonnell
Dr. Bell
Dr. Wm. Halliday."

An Extern or out-patient department was established in 1776, which the poor could attend for advice and assistance on Tuesdays and Saturdays at 12 o'clock.

In 1786 it was

"Resolved that a letter shall be addressed to each of the Physicians in this Town, requesting that they will be pleased to convene a Meeting of the

Gentlemen of the Faculty to Determine whether it may be agreeable to them to attend the Poorhouse in Rotation or be annually elected for that purpose."

Thereafter there were annual appointments made.

The need for much greater provision for the sick, especailly for help in their own homes, was soon evident. Dr. Malcolm, in his delightful "History of the General Hospital," published in 1851, when he was 32, suggests that many of the members of the Charitable Society saw their own limitations in relieving the sick, and that it was by them as much as anyone else that the need for a dispensary was first appreciated. The list of names on the prospectus of a General Dispensary for the Sick Poor issued in 1792 would bear out this idea. The authors of the prospectus, foremost among whom is the famous Dr. James McDonnell, emphasised the value of raising a fund

"for the relief of sick poor, of all descriptions, whether strangers or natives; that they may be supplied, AT THEIR OWN HABITATIONS, with such medicines, medical attendance and necessaries of life, as may be fitted to the exigencies of their situations. It is presumed that such an institution would tend greatly to promote the interest of Society at large, and particularly of the Belfast Charitable Society, by decreasing the number of common beggars; since it is certain, that many complaints in themselves trivial, and admitting readily of cure, become confirmed by neglect, and the industrious artist, with his family, is speedily reduced to ruin."

Among the first regulations adopted by the Dispensary was one which declared,

"It is our determined purpose to co-operate with the Belfast Incorporated Charitable Society in every measure calculated to promote its welfare."

It was further resolved to invite members of the Charitable Society to attend a meeting to consider how far the two institutions should be united, and the best means of rendering their union conducive to the public good. The necessary rooms for the Dispensary were at first provided free of charge by the Charitable Society in the Poorhouse, and Malcolm records that in the early days the Surgeons were required to do the dispensing for the Physicians. At last, in 1797, under the heading "Memorabilia Annorum," he notes,

"April 27 The first Hospital in Ireland for Fever, opened, with six beds in Factory Row, Belfast."

This is the modern Berry Street. There was a further move to West Street at the opposite corner of Smithfield. In 1815, the foundation stone of a new hospital was laid in Frederick Street, formerly Brewery Lane, and the building was duly dedicated to the Sick and to the art of Medicine. This was to become the Belfast General Hospital, later the Royal Hospital, and the forerunner of the Royal Victoria Hospital. With its establishment, the Charitable Society was no longer responsible for the admission of the sick, though it has always, as far as possible, taken care of those falling ill within its walls.

If the care of the needy was uppermost in the minds of the founders, responsibility for the strolling beggars was undertaken with equal thoroughness. A public advertisement of 1775 states,

". . . whosoever shall apprehend and bring to the House any such strolling beggars will be paid 5s. 5d. each after next Saturday."

In 1776 it was resolved

"that the Standing Committee have a proper place fitted up as a black hole for confining delinquents and vagrants,"

and

"that Mr. Bray do get the window of room pointed out to him built up for that purpose immediately."

The window remains built up still.

Later it was suggested

"that a cart and ass patrole the town twice a week, attended by the Beadle and two of the ablest men in the House who shall have staves and cloaks"

to collect these beggars. A certificate signed by the 2nd Marquis of Donegall authorising the Beadle to apprehend vagrants is preserved and hangs in the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery. It is signed with the Society's seal bearing the inscription,

"He that giveth to the Poor
lendeth to the Lord."

The Beadle and his men were popularly known as the Bang-Beggars, and wore a distinguishing uniform with scarlet collars on their coats. No doubt they had other work to do with their ass and cart, for an Act of Parliament of 1800 declared that

"in case any hog, sow, boar, or pig, or other swine shall at any time . . . be found straying or wandering in any street lane or place within the said town of Belfast or precincts thereof, it shall and may be lawful to . . . cause the same to be seized, or in case the same cannot conveniently be taken alive, to be killed . . . and be taken by the Belfast Charitable Society for the use and benefit of the poor therein."

The townsfolk had once the supreme delight of seeing the Sovereign of Belfast, in person, shoot two pigs found running about the streets.

The badging of beggars seems to have continued for some years. There are badges extant for the adjoining Parish of Shankill, but none issued by the Charitable Society seems to have survived. Some of those badged had their badges and licences taken from them afterwards, and they were made a fortnightly allowance by the Society instead. For examples:—

Grace Sheals, Barrack Street, 4 young children	2/2
Catherine Gillespy, Millfield, 77 years, and one grandchild ...	1/1
Rose Proctor, Long Lane, 75, Grandchild, falling fits	1/7½

Malcolm states that in the year 1795, outdoor relief was afforded to 336 poor families by this Charity. Or the badged poor might be brought into the House instead, for instance,

John Mulligan, Mass Lane, 75 years,
old wife to shift for self.
Mary Boyd, North Street, 80 years,
single, doating.

All this activity did not escape general notice, and in the "News-Letter" of 27th July, 1804, there appeared this paragraph :—

"The public are much endebted to the Rev. Mr. Bristow and the other gentlemen of the Committee of the Belfast Charitable Society for their exertions to free them from the host of beggars who daily beseige their doors. Several of these gentlemen perambulated the streets on Saturday last, attended by the Black Cart, when a number of mendicants were seized and conveyed to the Poorhouse. The public have been told of the healing powers of metalic tractors, but we hesitate not to say that the Black Cart of Belfast is a more powerful agent for the cure of diseases than all the tractors that ever were invented. The very sight of it gave vigour to the infirm, and the lame became so fleet that their most ardent pursuers were completely outdistanced. They seemed nearly to adopt the sentiment of the poet :—

'He that begs and runs away
May hope to beg another day,
But he that's by the Black Cart ta'en
Can never hope to beg again'."

The reply given to an inquiring architect,

"that the Poorhouse is not intended for the reception of children, but of aged and infirm persons,"

shows that it was a change from the original policy when in 1776 it was resolved

"that a number of poor children . . . be taken into the Poorhouse, to be educated and supported"

and

"that the boys and girls who at present infest the streets be first taken in."

A Master and Mistress were appointed

"for the government and instruction of poor children,"

and in addition to reading, writing and arithmetic, industrial pursuits such as spinning and knitting were taught. Children of the poor outside the House could also attend. Of the masters who ruled over this school, the most remarkable was David Boyd, who, in 1806, published a pamphlet in verse entitled "The Belfast Poor-House, an Historical and Descriptive Poem." He describes the foundation of the building and recounts the day-to-day work that went on in it :—

"With hasty strides I enter the great hall,
The grand capacious rendezvous for all;
The gen'ral board, call'd always once a year,
First meet, converse, and walk together here;
Here too, on Saturdays, poor persons stand,
With cheering hope, waiting the kind command
Of the Committee who review with care
Their doleful tale, and grant their humble pray'r;
For all who wish admittance here to gain,
Bring signed petitions, and their wish obtain."

He also relates what was done whenever the funds of the Society ran low :—

"So when the Poor-house stock wears out by chance,
The worthy Treasurer pays in advance,
One pithy sermon on a Notic'd day,
Produces plenty, evr'y debt to pay!"

and there is on record one donation of £1,000 given anonymously in the Church collection following such a Charity Sermon for the benefit of the House.

After he left the Poorhouse, Boyd ran a school of his own in Long Lane, and eventually he appears in the Belfast Almanac of 1836 as "Rev. D. Boyd, School-Master." His poem may not reach great literary heights, but it is full of interesting detail about the history of the Poorhouse. A quaint sketch of the building by his colleague Mr. Gordon, the first resident engineer to the House, forms the frontispiece.

The Society in its earlier days could admit and confine lunatics in the lower rooms. Some grim details are to be found in the reports of the Orderly, an office still held weekly by each of the Committee in turn.

"Sunday, May 15th

. . . Was informed that Elizabeth Grey, who was admitted on Saturday, 7th, had got over the rafters of the room where she was confined, and ran down to the gate, but was brought back, and has since been chained, which I confirmed, finding she had been so violent.

Monday, May 16th

I did not like to come up owing to the coldness of the weather."

And from a different Orderly :—

"The woman confined in the steeple appears to be in full possession of her mental powers, and she is brought down for the present."

Another entry reads :—

"Admitted a lunatic woman who had been put ashore from a ship near Whitehouse."

Further extracts from the Orderly book show the general work of the place at the time :—

"Wednesday evening gave an order for the admittance of Catherine Wall into the House, a poor woman, a cripple. I was well informed that she slept on her barrow in the public streets for the 3 preceding nights."

And again :—

"I think the little girls are in want of a small table to eat their meat of, they taking it off the ground."

There is a half-moon Sheraton table in the front hall to this day, much shortened in the legs, and some chairs similarly treated, and it may be that these were the result of this suggestion.

"On Thursday ordered a coffin for the child of the Bellman Irwin that was killed by a cart in North Street, and on Friday a coffin for the unfortunate man that hanged himself in John Street, and on the same day I directed the admission to the hospital of William Leonard, an American Sailor, as will

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be seen by his petition. I also directed the readmission of Mary Cunningham, who had run away from her apprenticeship, until the Committee should determine respecting her, but I understand she has eloped from this also."

If anyone wanted to leave the House even for a few hours, the permission of the Orderly had to be obtained. This was a frequent cause of trouble.

"Sunday All the poor except Widow Ross and Mary Bryson returned in proper time, the former did not return until half after five but sober and the latter not; till six o'clock & very drunk.

Monday ordered Mary Brison to be fedd on bread & water; till ordered otherwise, for her bad behavour yesterday."

and then, as if to mitigate this severity,

"Tuesday Distributed snuff and Tobacco as usual."

This distribution of snuff and tobacco by the Orderly occurred quite regularly as did the distribution of soap by the Ladies' Committee.

The Poorhouse stood at the north-west corner of Belfast. Spread out below it to the right lay the town, with a straight view down Donegall Street to the thatched cottages in Waring Street where the Commercial Buildings, now the "Northern Whig" Offices, were to be erected in 1820. Facing the Poorhouse were the cottages of Fishers' Row, which was then the main road to Carrickfergus, and had not yet attained the dignity of being called North Queen Street. There was no main road nearer the shore. From the gate of the Poorhouse, Brewery Lane, now Frederick Street, whose thatched cottages were standing until quite recently, ran down to the Lough where the men's boats lay. To the north of this were open meadows. There was no Crumlin Road or Antrim Road as those are understood to-day, and traffic out of the town in that direction passed through the Parish of Shankill. The Farset river ran through the Mill Field to its culvert, as it does still, but was, no doubt, a cleaner and more cheerful sight than the dreary and forgotten stream of to-day.

On 9th June, 1778, John Wesley was able to write in his Journal :—

"Thence we went to Belfast, the largest town in Ulster. . . . The streets are well laid out; are broad, straight, and well built. The Poorhouse stands on an eminence, fronting the main street, and having a beautiful prospect on every side, over the whole country. The old men, the old women, the male and female children are all employed according to their strength, and all their apartments are airy, sweet, and clean, equal to anything of the kind I have seen in England."

Had the great Evangelist looked from the Boardroom windows just two months earlier, he would have had more stirring events to report in his Journal, for off shore, and within full view if visibility permitted, the American Privateer "Ranger," under the command of the famous Paul Jones, was bombarding Carrickfergus Castle. The British sloop "Drake" attacked him, but he retaliated to such good effect that the British ship had eventually to strike her colours. Such was the first naval victory of the United States of America.

The Society took its full share in the general activities of the town in those days. A notice in the "Belfast News-Letter" of 24th June, 1785, reads :—

> "Mrs. Siddons having, unsolicited, generously proposed and chosen a Play for the benefit of the Charitable Institution of this Town, we are authorised to inform the Public that, in consequence thereof, on Monday next (27th) will be performed the celebrated tragedy of Macbeth.
>
> Part of Lady Macbeth—Mrs. Siddons. Tickets to be had from the Sovereign, Mr. Greg, Mr. Cunningham, and the Printers hereof."

The playhouse was then in Rosemary Lane, and there remains only an archway as a reminder of it. Mrs. Siddons visited Belfast on two further occasions, and on each she gave a charity performance for the benefit of the Society.

Nor were social events in the House itself lacking.

> "Resolved," says a minute, "that there shall be a Ball in the Poorhouse for the benefit of the House, on Wednesday next, being the 17th inst., and that the tickets be two and two pence . . . N.B. The Ball will be held in the new large Committee Room, now elegantly furnished."

On this, and many such occasions, the music was provided by the band of the Antrim Volunteer Company. These Volunteers used to drill in the Poorhouse grounds, and on occasions of review were actually billetted on the premises, for those were the days of constant fear of invasion by the French. It was within the memory of many that in 1760 a French squadron under Thurot had landed at Carrickfergus, and had captured and held the place for several days. They departed on the approach of the Volunteers, but their ships were met and defeated by the British Navy. This was only the beginning of the Institution's Military career. In 1798, the premises were requisitioned at forty-eight hours notice by the regular Army. It was only in 1802, when the Society had petitioned the Lord-Lieutenant-General asking either for the return of the premises with compensation, or their purchase by the Government, that the Committee met once more in the Poorhouse. During the 1939-45 War the premises were again requisitioned, and were occupied by the Royal Ulster Constabulary. The old Black Hole, the former dread of the vagrant, was used as an armoury, while the front lawn became a balloon site.

The history of several other organisations in the town touches that of the Charitable Society, and to record all these affairs in chronological order is quite impossible.

An interesting letter was received by the Committee in 1792 :—

> "The Memorial of the Belfast Reading Society to the Committee of the Belfast Incorporated Charitable Society humbly Sheweth—
>
> THAT your Memorialists have gone to much expense in purchasing a Collection of Books, and have formed a Society for the promotion of useful knowledge in this town and neighbourhood.
>
> That they are at present at a great loss for a proper place in which to deposit their books so as to render them of general use to the Society.
>
> They therefore request that your Committee will recommend to the

General Board of your Institution that the room known as the Ball Room shall be granted to your Memorialists for the reception and use of their Library until they can otherwise provide for themselves, and the Memorialists shall entertain a due sense of gratitude and respect."

They complied with this request

"on condition that the Reading Society pay an annual rent to this Charity of Five Guineas so long as they occupy the room."

Such is part of the early history of the Belfast Library and Society for Promoting Knowledge, founded in 1788, and better known to-day as the Linenhall Library. It is rather an anti-climax to have to record that the books and other property were never moved to the Poorhouse Ball Room, as it was considered that the premises were not sufficiently central.

In 1793, the Curate of St. Anne's, the Rev. John Clark, and Mrs. McTier, a sister of Dr. William Drennan, founded the Humane Female Society for the Relief of Lying-in Women. They applied to the Charitable Society for the use of the large centre room as a maternity ward, but the Board's Minute of 7th January, 1794, records that

"Messrs. Apsley, McTier and Sampson having reported that the House is in general full save the Ball Room which has only six beds in it, and Several of the rooms too crowded, it was unanimously

Resolved that a Respectful Negative be given to the application from the Ladies of the Humane Society."

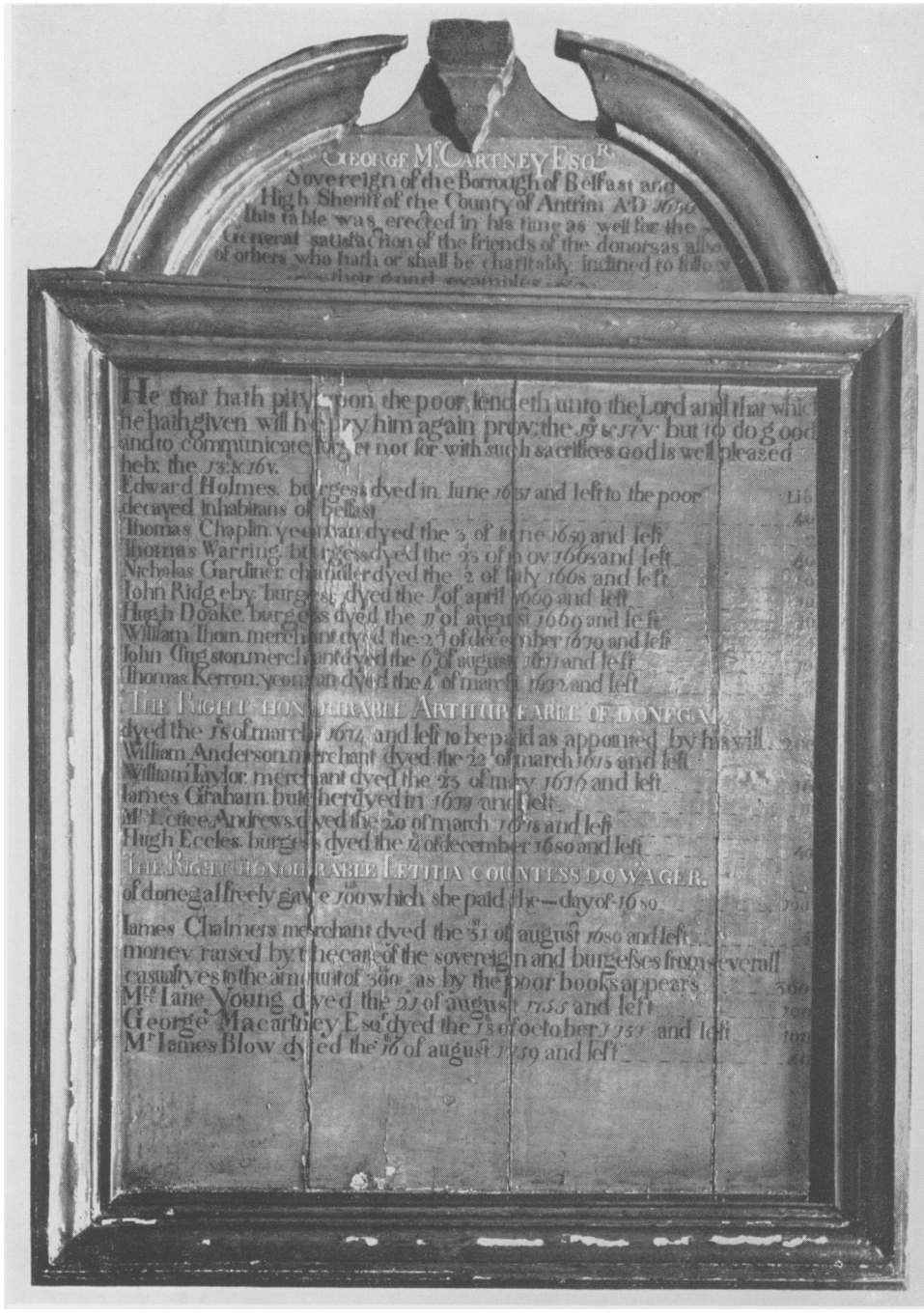
The Lying-In Hospital was first established in No. 25 Donegall Street, a house still in existence as business premises at the entrance to Exchange Court. This accommodation was very poor, and the Ladies were granted a building site, on that part of the new Antrim Road now known as Clifton Street, by the Charitable Society free of rent, provided the site was used for no other purpose. When the Medical School opened, the need for providing clinical material and instruction arose, and the Ladies, considering that this lay outside the original scope of the agreement, handed the Hospital back to the Charitable Society, who restored it to them once more at a rent of 2/6 per annum provided that the original purpose was not exceeded. It was, of course, inevitable that eventually students would attend the practice of the Hospital, and there was a good deal of unpleasantness between the Ladies and their Medical Staff, and between the Lying-In Hospital and the Society. The Society took the view that the teaching of obstetrics was a money-making business and raised the rent, stating that

"they have no wish to make a profit out of the Hospital, but will not allow others to do so."

The trouble once started between the two institutions was destined on various pretexts to last for many years. Only in 1902 does the annual report state that

"The negotiations with the Maternity Hospital bave been brought to an amicable conclusion, and the Committee are able to report that both the Society and the Hospital are satisfied with what has been arranged."

The Maternity Hospital in Townsend Street was opened in 1904, and was the predecessor of the Royal Maternity Hospital.



Old Charity Board, 1680.

PLATE 1

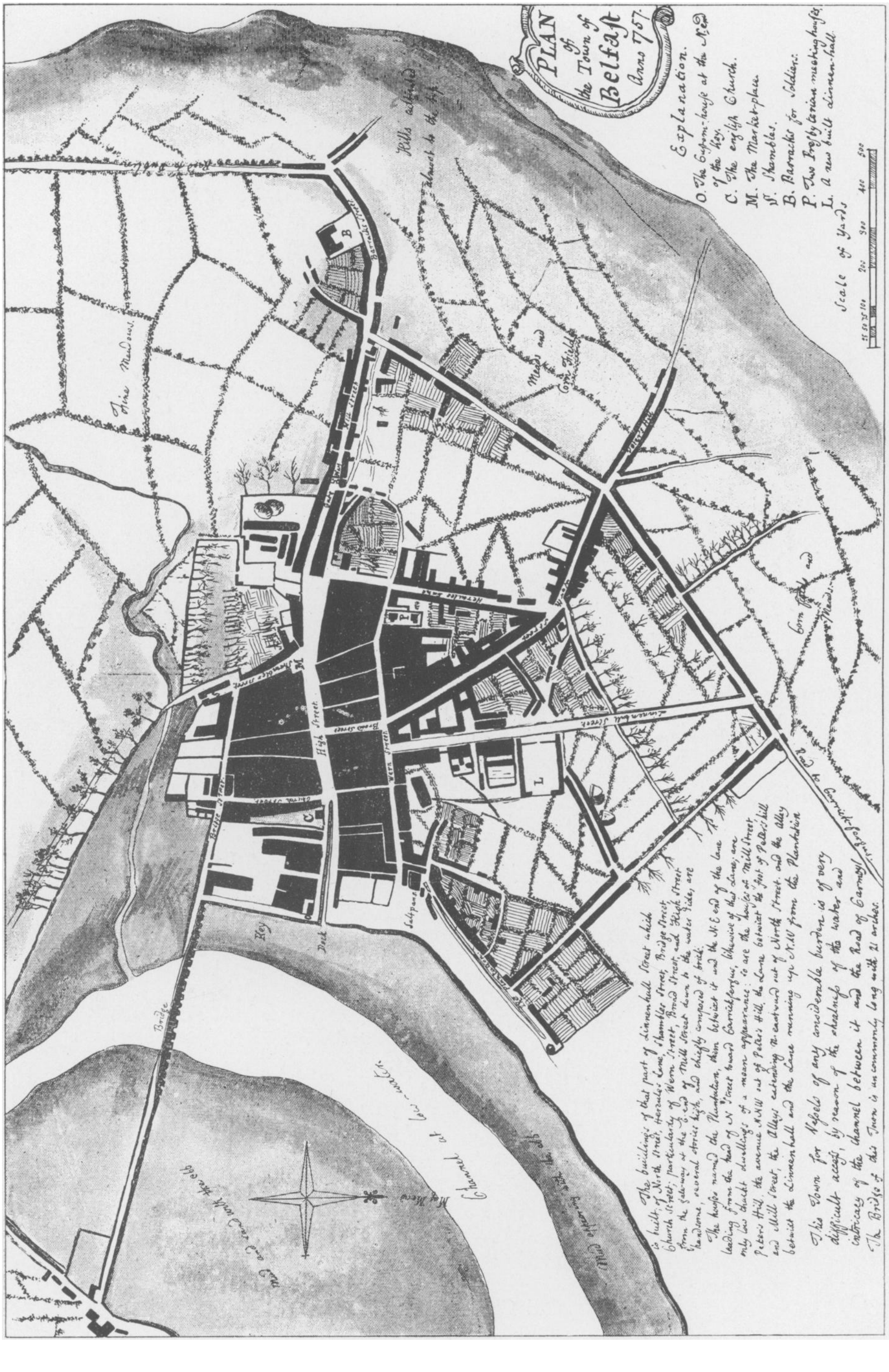
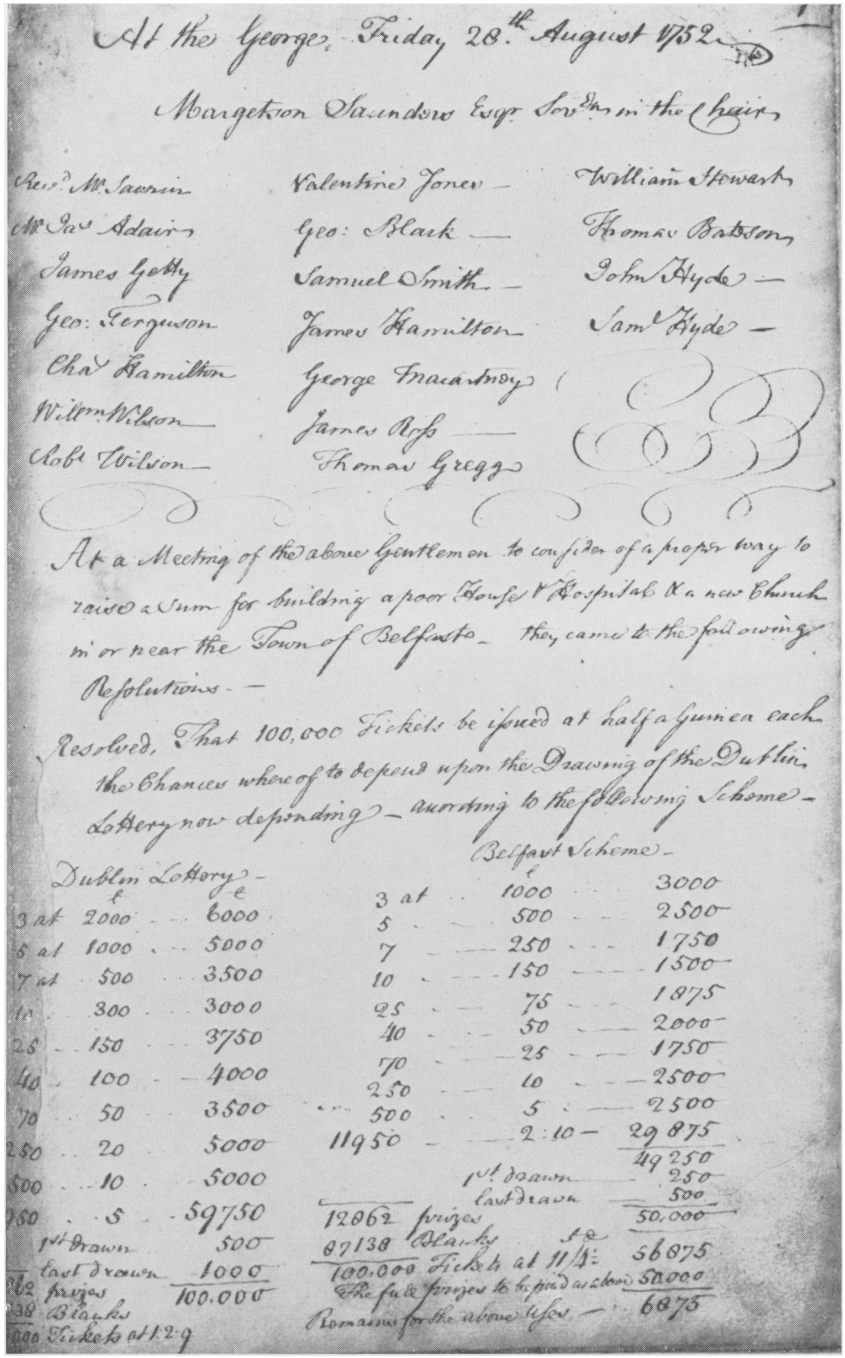

PLAN of the Town of Belfast Anno 1757
Explanation.
O. The Custom-house at the Head of the Key.
C. The english Church.
M. The Market-place
S. Shambles.
B. Barracks for Soldiers.
P. Two Presbyterian meeting houses.
L. A new built Linnen-hall.
Scale of Yards

PLATE 2



At the George, Friday 28th August 1752

Margetson Saunders Esqr Sovr in the Chair

Revd Mr Sawrin — Valentine Jones — William Stewart
Mr Jas Adair — Geo: Black — Thomas Batson
James Getty — Samuel Smith — John Hyde —
Geo: Ferguson — James Hamilton — Sam Hyde —
Chas Hamilton — George Macartney
Willm Wilson — James Ross —
Robt Wilson — Thomas Gregg

At a Meeting of the above Gentlemen to consider of a proper way to raise a Sum for building a poor House & Hospital & a new Church in or near the Town of Belfast — they came to the following Resolutions —

Resolved, That 100,000 Tickets be issued at half a Guinea each the Chances whereof to depend upon the Drawing of the Dublin Lottery now depending — according to the following Scheme —

Dublin Lottery —

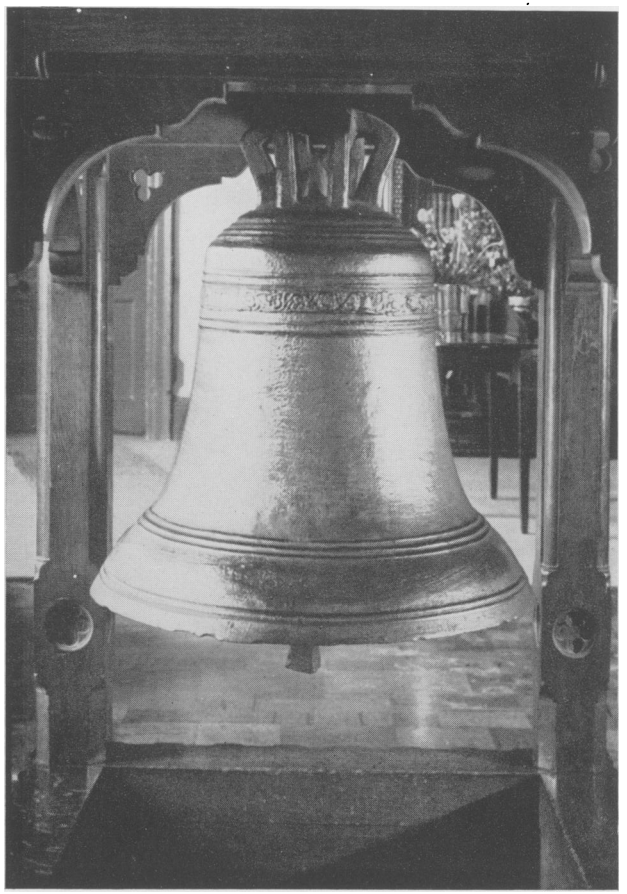
	£	£
3 at	2000	6000
5 at	1000	5000
7 at	500	3500
10	300	3000
25	150	3750
40	100	4000
70	50	3500
250	20	5000
500	10	5000
980	5	59750
1st drawn		500
last drawn		1000
962 prizes		100.000
038 Blanks		
000 Tickets at 12:9		

Belfast Scheme —

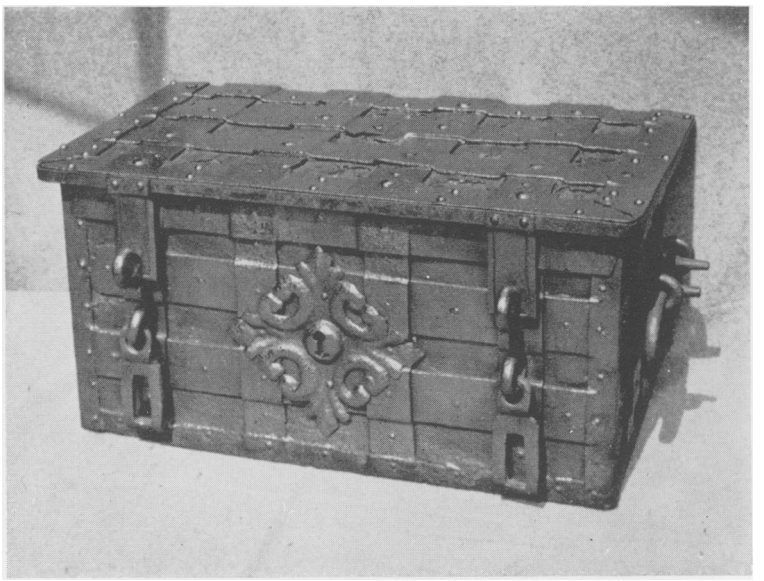
	£	£
3 at	1000	3000
5	500	2500
7	250	1750
10	150	1500
25	75	1875
40	50	2000
70	25	1750
250	10	2500
500	5	2500
11950	2:10 —	29875
		49250
1st drawn		250
last drawn		500
12062 prizes		50.000
87138 Blanks	£	
100.000 Tickets at 11½		56875
The full prizes to be paid as above		50000
Remains for the above Uses —		6875

Minute of the Inaugural Meeting, 28th August, 1752.

PLATE 3



(*a*) Old Parish Church Bell.

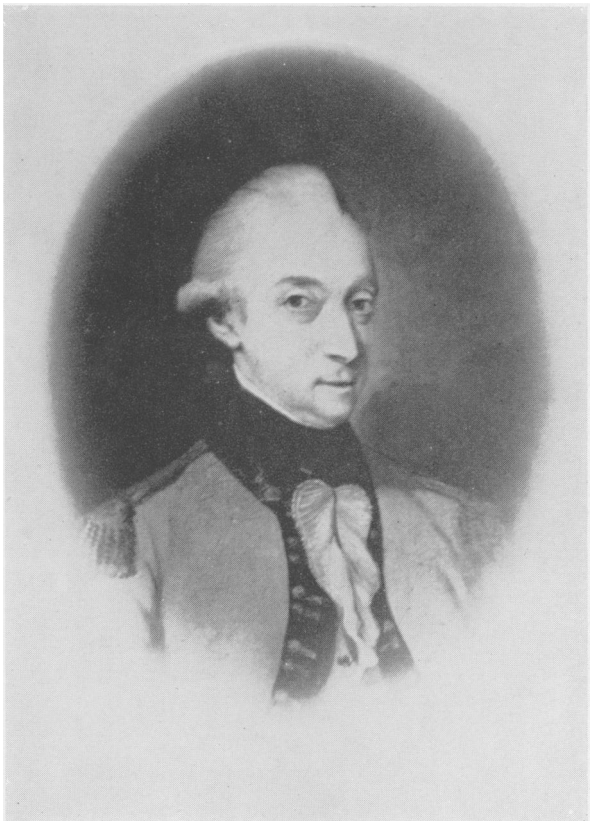


(*b*) "Spanish Armada" Chest.

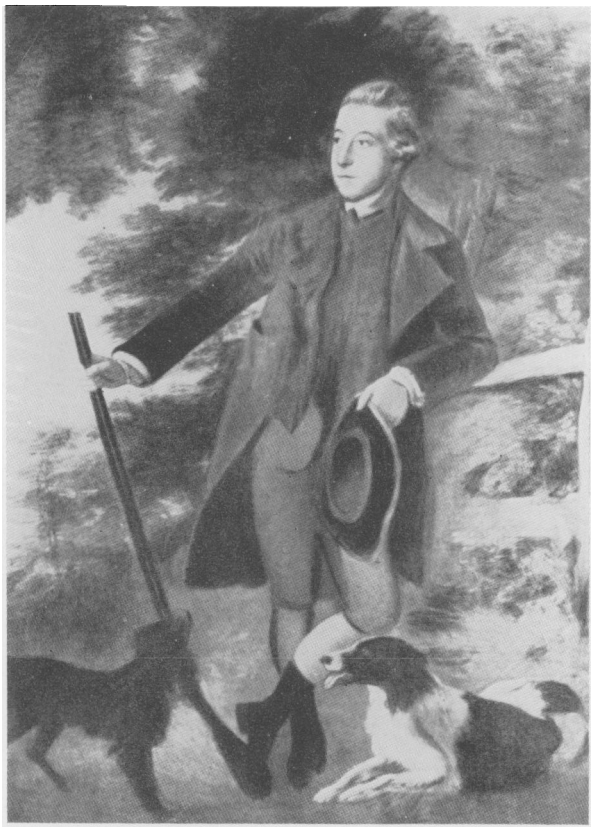
PLATE 4

(*a*) The foundation stone was laid in 1771, and (*b*) the building first opened for use in 1774.

PLATE 5



(*a*) Stewart Banks, Esq.



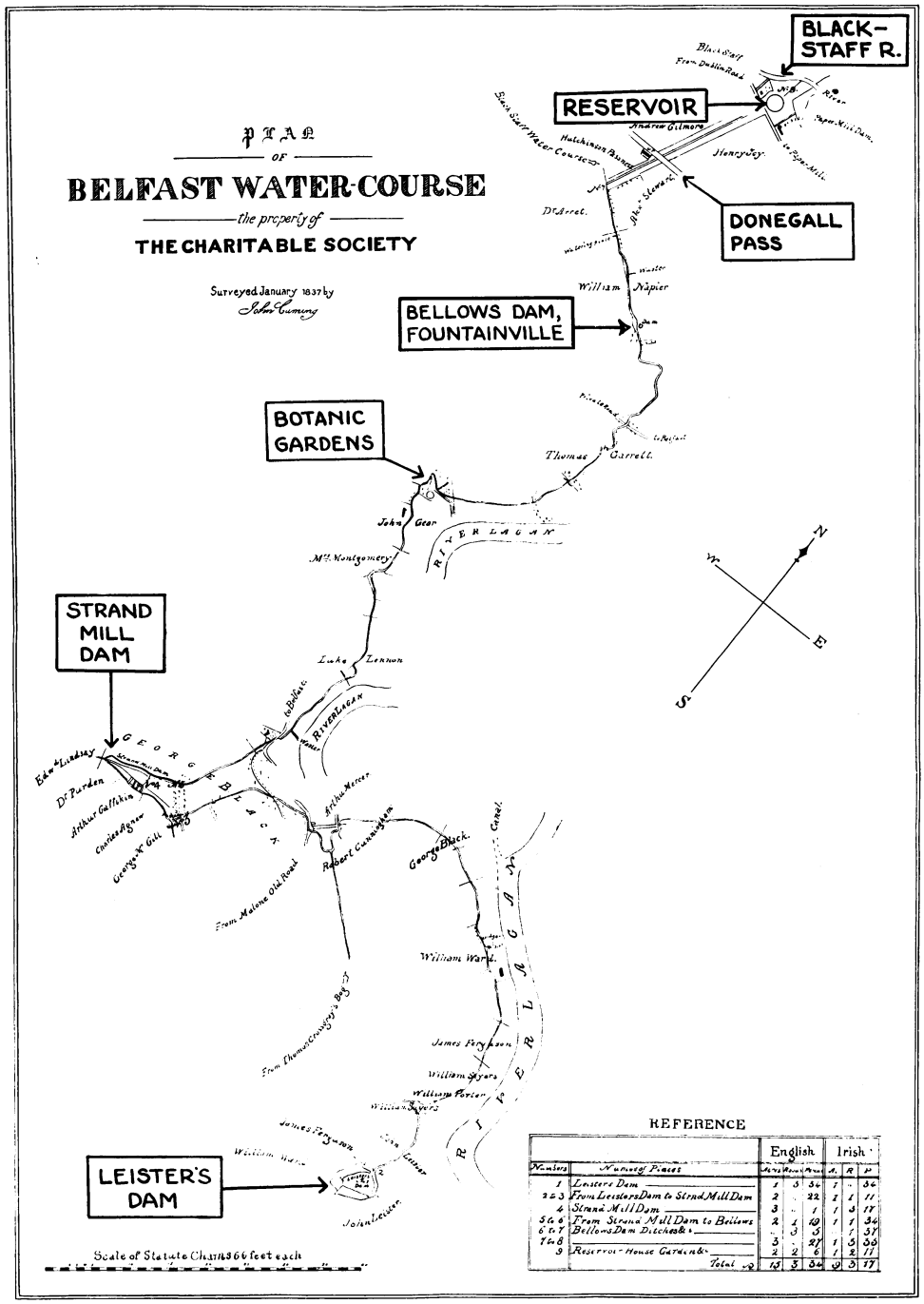
(*b*) Arthur Chichester, 1st Marquis of Donegal.

PLATE 6

(*a*) The Skin Hospital, Glenravel Street.

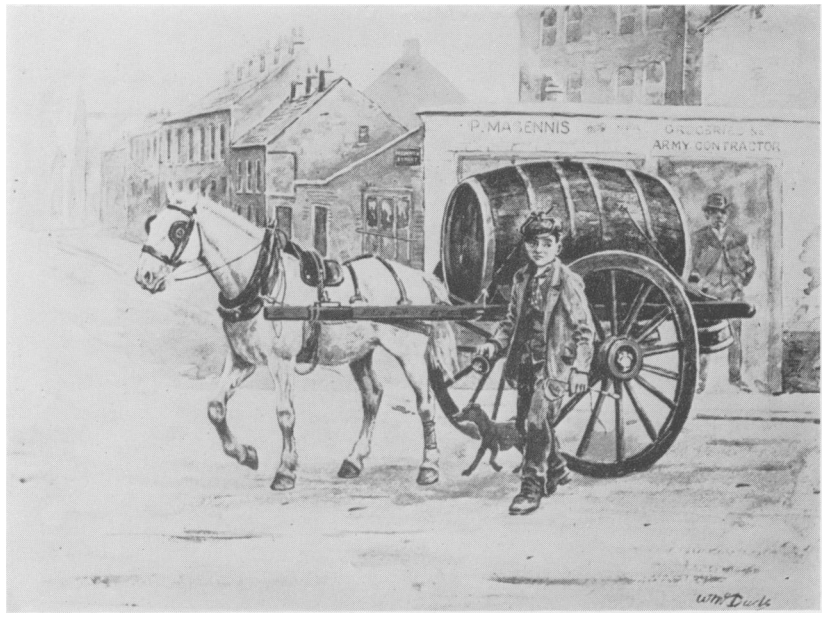
(*b*) Engineers' Hall, College Street.

PLATE 7

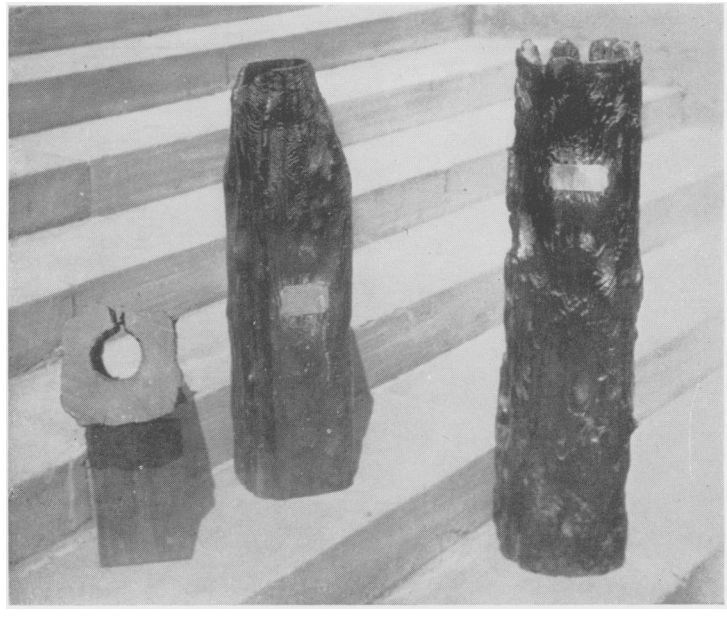


Numbers	Names of Places	English A.	R.	P.	Irish A.	R.	P.
1	Lesters Dam	1	3	34	1	.	34
2 & 3	From Leesters Dam to Strand Mill Dam	2	.	22	2	1	11
4	Strand Mill Dam	3	.	1	1	3	19
5 & 6	From Strand Mill Dam to Bellows	2	1	18	1	1	34
6 to 7	Bellows Dam Ditchetts	.	3	5	.	1	37
7 & 8		3	.	27	1	3	36
8	Reservoir-House Garden &c.	2	2	6	1	2	11
	Total	13	3	34	9	3	17

PLATE 8

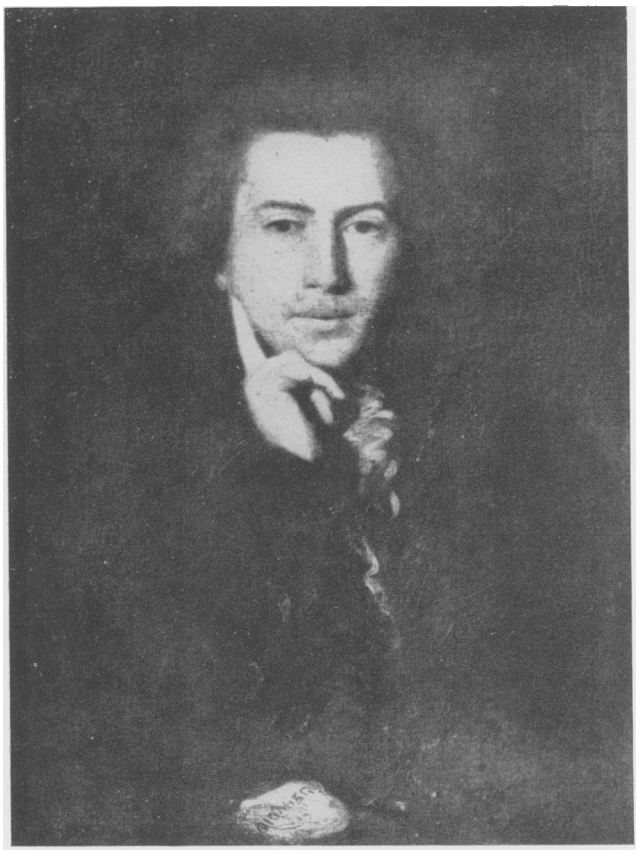


(*a*) Belfast Water Cart.



(*b*) Elm Water Pipes.

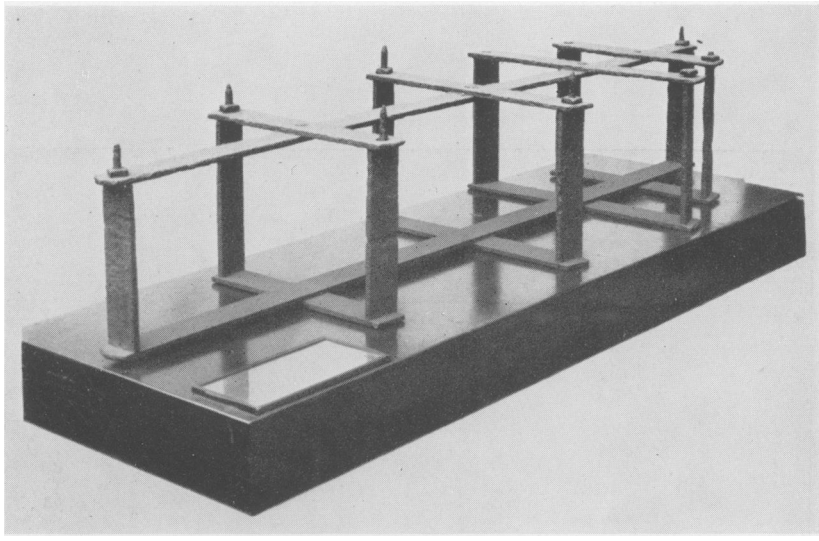
PLATE 9



(*a*) Doctor William Drennan.

(*b*) Miss Mary Ann McCracken.

PLATE 10



(*a*) Coffin Guard.

(*b*) The Cholera Ground.

PLATE 11

Edward Benn, Esq.

PLATE 12

Other institutions have been, and some still are, tenants of the Charitable Society.

One of the earliest leases of this kind was to the body now known as the Ulster Society for Promoting the Education of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind, who, in 1835, opened their first residential school in premises in College Street on a site owned by the Charitable Society. Afterwards this building was known as the Engineers' Hall, and it is now occupied by Messrs. Bell and Hull (Plate 10).

In 1865, Dr. H. S. Purdon founded a dispensary for the treatment of diseases of the skin in Academy Street, and thanks to a bequest from Edward Benn (Plate 19) this was replaced by the Belfast Hospital for Diseases of the Skin in 1875 on ground in Glenravel Street owned by the Society (Plate 11). Glenravel was the site of the iron ore deposits in County Antrim owned by the Benn family. This Hospital was completely destroyed by enemy action in 1941, when the late Dr. Allworthy, Physician to the Hospital and a Consultant to the Charitable Society, narrowly escaped with his life, having been previously bombed out of his own house.

Next door to that site, and also on the Society's land stands the Benn Ulster Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital, built and endowed by Edward Benn in 1874. It is incidental to the story of the Charitable Society that the Benn family also founded the Samaritan Hospital.

Glenravel Street is the site of the Belfast High School, formerly the Mercantile Academy. The Rev. John Pyper opened his Academy in Eglinton Street in 1854 in a building of which the air raids of 1941 have left no trace. Before it moved to its present site the school was conducted for a time in the house on the corner of Donegall Street and North Queen Street.

At the close of the eighteenth Century there seemed to be no civic or philanthropic duty that could not be expected of the Charitable Society, though some of these extra tasks were suggested as a means of making the institution more fully self-supporting.

It was at one time proposed to the Committee that they should undertake, in part, the cleansing of the streets, but they

> "were unanimously of the opinion that it would not be eligible for the Charitable Society to establish any cart or carts for that purpose."

That such a proposal was ever seriously made, and it was made by no less a person than the Rev. William Bristow, Sovereign of the Town, shows how important was the part played by the Poorhouse in the growing community, for he hoped by this means to supplement the Society's income. Nevertheless, it did take on two peculiar tasks that were to have the most significant consequences: the training of apprentices to the cotton trade, and the supply of water to the town.

At one time the linen industry was in serious difficulties, for lack of capital prevented it from competing with the more efficient manufacture of cotton in

England. Nicholas Grimshaw suggested in a Memorial to the Society that the children in the House should be trained for this purpose, and in 1779

> "A proposal is made by R. Joy and T. McCabe to employ a large number of children in the Poorhouse in the cotton manufacture, at such rates as their respective services shall be deserving of . . .
>
> The said McCabe and Joy have, at a considerable expense in money and attention procured various machinery useful in this business, as well for carding and spinning as weaving, in the best and most expeditious manner, their intention being to introduce a particular species of this manufacture into this place after the mode and with all the advantages that are so effectually practised in England . . .
>
> The places for the above purposes are now vacant, which are the three rooms on the north-east wing of the cellar story."

In February, 1780

> "It is with great pleasure that your Committee remarks to you the probable advantages that may in a few years acrue to the community at large from having so many children instructed in the different branches of the cotton manufacture, and they are of opinion that this consideration is of much more importance than that of any profit that should arise to the House from their industry."

This was a true forecast. As the result of this training, cotton soon became of far greater importance in Ulster than linen, and eventually, so great were the profits from cotton, that the linen industry was rejuvenated with the fresh capital and machinery it had so badly needed. And those who were to make their fortunes in this renaissance did not forget the Poorhouse, as the Charters Wing of the building proves.

Thomas McCabe and Robert Joy, who made the proposal about this cotton venture in support of Nicholas Grimshaw's memorial, were two very remarkable members of the Society's Commitee.

Thomas McCabe was a watch-maker in North Street, who prospered and bought a small estate called Vicinage behind the Poorhouse, where St. Malachy's College now stands. On one occasion in 1786 in the Assembly Rooms he was asked to join in a scheme to float a slave ship company. His answer was,

> "May God wither the hand and consign the name to eternal infamy of the man who will sign that document."

And so the scheme fell through. Dr. McCabe, who was at one time Physician to the Poorhouse, was his grandson.

The Joys were the proprietors of the "Belfast News-Letter," and had a paper mill at Cromac, a fact recalled by the existence of Joy Street. Robert Joy, who owned a cotton mill, was the uncle of Mary Ann and Henry Joy McCracken. When she was over 90 years of age, Miss McCracken wrote of her uncle :—

> "He projected our 'Old Poorhouse', the first in Belfast, for a shelter for the poor . . . My uncle Robert paid his last visit to it, when unable to walk, in a sedan chair. From its erection, as long as health was spared him, it had been his constant study to promote the comfort of the inmates in every respect. The husband and wife were not separated, but had curtains round their bed; and he studied to give them variety of food, and in various ways

to promote an increase to the means of support, one of which was a shower bath, and anyone by paying one guinea a-year, might use it whenever they wished."

The Charitable Society has never taken any more surprising responsibility on its shoulders than the supply of water to Belfast. In 1678 George McCartney, that same Sovereign of the town whose name is on the old subscription list from the former Corporation Church, raised a voluntary fund to bring water into the town in wooden pipes. This supply was augmented in 1733 by the lease of other springs and rivers to William Johnston of Newforge, afterwards known as "Pipewater Johnston." By 1795 the growth of the town and the inadequacy of the supply created an opportunity which the Poorhouse seized of securing a lease of various springs from the Marquis of Donegall. The chief of these were the Bellows Spring at Fountainville, now marked by a brick archway in the north gable of Royal Terrace, and springs at Deramore "in a marshed Ground between Belfast and what is called the Strand Mill," and where the remains of an old reservoir can still be seen. To these was added Lyster's spring, near Newforge, so that there was a continuous piped system from Newforge through Deramore by way of the Botanic Gardens to Fountainville, and thence to Cromac where the water was discharged into a reservoir near where Adelaide Street enters Ormeau Avenue to-day (Plate 8). The scheme had only been in operation two years when the Water Committee reported to the General Board

"that the revenue now arising from the new supply (exclusive of the produce of the two Water Carts), even in this early stage of the business, is more than sufficient to defray the interest of the money expended and borrowed, and that they have every reason to believe it will, in the end, prove a valuable and permanent Fund for the support of the Poor" (Plate 13).

The supply was considerably increased, and more pipes, at first elm but afterwards metal, were laid down to conduct water to the streets and houses. Sections of these wooden pipes are still preserved (Plate 14). An Act of Parliament was necessary in 1800 before those being supplied with this water could be compelled to pay a water rate.

A picturesque clause reflects the Belfast of the time :—

"It shall and may be lawful for the president and assistants of the said Belfast Charitable Society . . . to make agreement . . . with all brewers, malsters, distillers, sugar-bakers, tanners, skinners, dyers, butchers, and slaughterers, inn-keepers, or any other description of persons, tradesmen, or manufacturers who have any extraordinary consumption of water for a sufficient quantity of water according to their respective consumptions."

By 1817 a further Act of Parliament was necessary. The supply of water to a rapidly growing town was becoming more and more a matter for a special authority, and therefore Spring Water Commissioners for this sole purpose were to be appointed by the Society. In view of the large amount of their money invested in the scheme, the Charity was to be paid an income, fixed within certain limits, by these Commissioners who really formed a special sub-committee. This arrangement stood until 1840, when yet another Act of Parliament set up an

independent Water Board. It is still the right of the Belfast Charitable Society to receive an annual income of £800 and free water from the Commissioners.

There were other ways in which the Society tried to make itself financially self-supporting.

At first certain conditions in the Grant, under which the surplus land was held from Lord Donegall made it impracticable to create commercial sub-leases, but an Act of Parliament eventually made it possible to make sub-lettings for a reasonable length of time, so that in this way there was established a permanent but, unfortunately, fixed income. In 1785, when the Ballast Corporation, the forerunner of the present Harbour Board, was created by Act of Parliament, it was enacted that all profits were to go to the Charitable Society. As events proved, the Ballast Board never had any working profits, but the tradition established has proved a firm sentimental bond, and the Society has on several occasions received considerable gifts from the Harbour Commissioners.

The work of the House itself in what may be called the Poorhouse phase is best summed up by a statement that appears for the first time in the annual report of 1827.

> "This Charity," it says, "is appropriated to the maintenance of aged and infirm poor, and the education of neglected or deserted children. . . . The children are apprenticed as soon as they are tolerably instructed in reading, and writing, and arithmetic."

In the Boardroom to-day there is one of the original Indentures of Apprenticeship. It reads :—

> "Harriet Martin, with her own consent and with the consent of the President and Assistants of the Belfast Charitable Society, doth put herself apprentice to Mr. Samuel Nelson, to learn the business of a servant and to sew, and with him (after the manner of an apprentice) to dwell and serve from the date hereof until the full term of seven years . . . during which term the said apprentice her said master faithfully shall serve, his secrets keep, his lawful commands everywhere gladly do. Hurt to her said master she shall not do, cause or procure to be done of others. She shall not haunt nor use taverns, ale-houses or play-houses, nor absent herself from her lawful said master's service day or night unlawfully."

The report continues :—

> "All the men's, boys', women's, and girls' woollen clothes, with all the sheets, shirts, and shifts of men, women and children, and flannels for the hospitals, are made and mended in the house. The shoes are in part made and all of them mended by paupers. A quantity of shirting is woven from yarn spun in the house by the women and girls, and the washing for such a family is sufficient to occupy a number of active hands. The Housemaid's business is done by one woman, with the assistance of a few of the girls. The slating and masonry is done by the inmates when practicable. All the jobbing and the making of a great number of coffins for the inmates, for extern poor, and for the fever hospital, amounting this year to 336 coffins, are done by house carpenters, who are paupers. The garden—which supplies abundance of vegetables, and of which a surplus was sold which exceeded the cost for seeds and manure—is laboured and weeded by the men and boys. The work of the graveyard and the saving of hay are done by some of the old men."

In that year there were 200 aged and 203 young in the House, a figure that was to rise in 1839 to 238 aged and 242 young, 480 in all.

The New Burying Ground.

Until well into the nineteenth century ships could come up into the foot of High Street, and maps of about that time show a large bay of the Lagan which, if it were there to-day, would fill Victoria Square and a large area to the south of it. There was thus tidal water on each side of the tongue of land on which the former Parish or old Corporation Church stood, the site where St. George's Church stands to-day, and although the building had been replaced by the Church of St. Anne in Donegall Street in 1777, the old burying-ground continued to be used. A clause in an Act of Parliament of 1880 introduces yet another facet of the work of the Charitable Society :—

> "Whereas the old church-yard or burying place in the town of Belfast, is situated nearly in the centre of the said town, and by means of an encrease of population therein, the same has become insufficient for the purposes intended; and whereas the water from the sea occasionally overflows the said yard, and the burying of dead bodies therein by the reason and means aforesaid, is become a public nuisance, for the remedy whereof the late Marquis of Donegall granted a piece of ground above the poor-house and infirmary of said town . . . be it enacted therefore . . . that . . . no dead bodies whatsoever shall be interred in the said old church-yard."

The Society has thus for many years had its own burying-ground. It was for generations the fashionable cemetery of Belfast. Here, in stone, are the names of those who shared in the political and professional life of the town, who created its ship-building and linen industries, its trades and crafts, and of those who, in the fulness of time, and prompted by their love of Belfast, founded or worked for its various philanthropic organisations.

Among the many worthies of the town who lie here, it is right to give pride of place to that West Indian Merchant of Winecellar Entry, Valentine Jones, 1st, who was at the inaugural meeting of the Charitable Scheme in the George Inn in 1752, and, seeing the Society through all its growing pains, "lived respected and died lamented" at the advanced age of 94, to be buried in 1805 in the shadow of the building he did so much to create. He was one of the founders of the General Dispensary, and a member of the Committee of the Reading Society. In 1799, at a Ball in the Assembly Rooms, he took part in a quadrille with his son Valentine Jones, his grandson Valentine Jones, and his great grandson Valentine Jones. Valentine Jones, 2nd, continued the family connection with the Charitable Society.

Here too are buried many of the doctors who gave their services to the Society in its early days. Dr. John Mateer, whose name appears on the original list of those attending the House, and who died in 1806 at the age of 79, lies here, and so does Robert Stephenson, Surgeon, also on the first list of doctors, and who served on the Commitee for twenty-six years. He also attended the Lying-In Hospital.

The Ulster Medical Society was formed by the union of two earlier societies. The older of these was the Belfast Medical Society which was founded in 1806, and much of whose early history can be traced here. Dr. Samuel Smith Thomson, who is buried here, was its first President. He was Consultant Physician to the General Hospital, and was, in Dr. Malcolm's words, the Father of the Medical profession in Belfast when he died in 1849. He was also President of the Anacreontic Society, afterwards the Philharmonic Society. The second President of the Medical Society was Dr. William Halliday, who lies in an unnamed family vault in the Clifton Street burying-ground. His name is the last on the list of original Physicians. One of the first names is that of Dr. Alexander Halliday, his uncle, who was the first President of the Reading Society, a position in which he was succeeded by his nephew.

The Medical Society's third President was Dr. William Drennan of Cabin Hill (Plate 15). The inscription on his headstone in the burying-ground reads :—

"Pure just benign; thus filial love would trace
The virtues hallowing this narrow place.
The Emerald Isle may grant a wider claim,
And link the Patriot with his Country's name."

For it was he who first called Ireland the Emerald Isle. He was one of the founders of the United Irishmen, and was tried for but acquitted of treason on account of his political views. He does not appear to have been a physician to the Society, but he was a member of the Committee.

It was not until 1798 that Edward Jenner published his Work on Vaccination, so it is of great interest to turn to the Minutes of the Society to find,

"Poor House, 9th March, 1782

. . . Dr. Drennan produced and read before the board a paper setting forth the utility of a mode of public innoculation being introduced into this house and supported by its countenance.

Resolved that the thanks of this corporation is due to Dr. Drennan for his very useful and public spirited proposal.

It was then

". . . Resolved unanimously that the plan of Innoculation proposed by Doctr. Drennan be adopted.

Resolved that the centre building of this House, or as much of it as the Gentlemen of the Faculty shall approve of, be set apart for that purpose."

Finally, on 9th May, 1792, when the many rules were being drawn up for the guidance of the Belfast Charitable Dispensary, No. 45 stated :—

"At a proper season, persons of all ages may be inoculated for the small pox at the Dispensary."

Dr. Drennan was one of the founders of the Academical Institution, and when it was opened in 1814 it was he who gave the address. In accordance with instructions given on his death-bed, his funeral procession stopped for a few minutes at the gate of what was then the New College.

Dr. Andrew Marshall is buried here. He was the first secretary and treasurer of the Belfast Medical Society, and afterwards its President. He began his medical

career as a Naval Surgeon, and served under Admiral Gambier in the Baltic in the operations which made Heligoland a British possession. He was afterwards in partnership in High Street with his brother-in-law, Dr. Drummond, and was Surgeon to both the Charitable Society and the General Hospital.

It is incidental to the story of the Clifton Street burying-ground that the Belfast Medical Society at one stage fell into a state of neglect, and that among those to whom it owed its survival were Dr. McDonnell and Dr. Forcade. James McDonnell is too well known to need further mention. Dr. Forcade was a retired Army Surgeon who had served all through the Peninsular campaigns with "the Duke," and, as Malcolm says, "so distinguished himself as to receive the old gentleman's particular commendation." He was the first Treasurer of the revived Society, and the founder of the Feast in commemoration of its resuscitation. Dr. Forcade was, like Andrew Marshall, Surgeon to both the Charitable Society and the General Hospital.

The best-known grave in the place is certainly that of Miss Mary Ann McCracken, who, as the headstone says, "wept by her brother's scaffold 17th July, 1798," and who died in 1866 at the age of 96. A niece of Henry and Robert Joy, it is not surprising to find her closely associated with the work of the Society, and from 1832 until 1851 she seems to have been both Chairman and Secretary of the Ladies' Committee. All the minutes are in her own hand, and there is no mention of anyone in the Chair. As her appearance suggests (Plate 16), she was a practical person who did not mince words.

> "The Ladies . . . recommend that sunblinds should be put up without delay in the children's hospitals. Some of them have very sore eyes & many are ill in measles whose eyes are consequently weak."
>
> ". . . the Ladies take the liberty of suggesting the propriety or rather the absolute necessity of establishing a regular system of visiting the apprentices, about three or four times in the year, and on such occasions to converse with master and servant apart, and when any disagreement appears to make enquiry at the nearest neighbour (particularly at such as have apprentices with whom they appear to be on good terms) as to the temper and dispositions of the discontented master and his family, in order to ascertain the real state of the case."

And later she takes up the cudgels again in a fine trenchant Minute :—

> "Poorhouse 3rd January, 1838.
>
> The Ladies have heard with infinite surprise and regret that the gentlemen are opposed to promoting industry in the House by the only efficient means that of allowing individuals to derive some little advantage from their own exertions—at the same time the Ladies are aware of the argument that may be made on the occasion viz. that it is the duty of the inmates of the House to devote all their abilities to the general good of the institution by which they are supported—yet as it is an incontrovertable fact, that the highest and best educated classes of society require some additional stimulus to exertion, besides a sense of duty and the public good, it is too much therefore to expect that those of inferior advantages should rise higher in the scale of perfection. The Ladies therefore respectfully request the gentlemen may reconsider the matter and examine it in every point of view.

For the first place they will please to recollect that every human being whatever may be their station in life ought to have some leisure time daily at their disposal which is the case with servants in all well regulated families, besides in this House at this season of the year the greatest proportion of the time which those who are engaged in active duties (particularly in attending to the children) have at their own disposal, they would be obliged to spend in darkness & consequently in idleness if not allowed to earn the means of purchasing candles for themselves as what they get from the House does not afford light for more than one hour out of the twenty four thus by permitting matters to remain as they were so much time is saved which would otherwise be lost and the coppers which are thereby earned are still for the good of the Institution being for the use of the inmates. The gentlemen will also please to observe that it would have the appearance of partiality and inconsistency to allow some to derive profit from their industry particularly those receiving salaries and deny the same indulgence to others who receive none. . . .

The Ladies would also recommend that the children should be washed at night in tepid water in the schoolroom in place of the morning in the open air."

After the Battle of Antrim, her brother Henry Joy McCracken, the United Irishman, was hanged from the Market House in High Street, and his body, after vain attempts at resuscitation had been made, was buried in the Old Churchyard at St. George's. Some years afterwards, workmen unearthed remains believed to be his from this spot, and these were later interred in the same grave as Mary Ann McCracken.

Nearby, their kinsmen the Joys are commemorated. One of the last names in this long line, many of whom served the Society, is that of Alix Bruce Joy, 3rd Officer, W.R.N.S., "Lost at sea through enemy action, August, 1941."

The only memorial in this town to William Ritchie, the ship builder, seems to be his own tombstone in Clifton Street, yet it is impossible to assess what his work has meant to the growth and prosperity of Belfast. He came from Scotland in 1791 to establish his own shipyard on a site now covered over by Corporation Square. He also undertook the construction of a graving dock for the Corporation, which he completed in 1800. This dock is still in existence and is now called the No. 1 Clarendon Graving Dock. He was a member of the Charitable Society and of the Academical Institution, and for a period was Chairman of the Committee of Management of the Belfast General Hospital. When he died in 1834, it was recorded of him that

"There was no institution in Belfast of a public nature, whether literary, scientific or charitable, which was not largely endebted to him for support."

Of the Ulster Families buried here who promoted philanthropic work in Belfast, a special place must be given to the names of Charters, Benn and Mulholland.

To John Charters, the Charitable Society is indebted for a wing to the House, and so was the old General Hospital, a fact which is still recalled by the Charters ward in the Royal Victoria Hospital, while his family name is also remembered by a Scholarship in the Royal Belfast Academical Institution of which he was a

pupil. Edward Benn is buried here. He presented two wings to the Society to complete the present quadrangle of buildings. His portrait hangs on the stairway of the House (Plate 12). It was his brother George, the historian of Belfast, who made the particularly humane Benn Bequest, which provides a special dinner for the residents each Christmas and Easter.

The Mulholland family built a wing to the old General Hospital, and their name is also perpetuated in the Mulholland Ward of the Present Royal Victoria Hospital.

One of the handsomest stones in the graveyard is that of the Journeymen Coopers of Belfast. This was erected in 1812, and carries on its reverse the names of those members who are buried in the plot.

Nor is the place without its curiosities. There is the dog on the top of the Hyndman memorial, but perhaps the quaintest of all is the headstone of a former Professor of Mathematics in the Academical Institution, which simply states, "Young! moulders here, 1829."

In the days of the body-snatchers it was not unusual for relatives to watch over a family grave for weeks after a burial. The gun and revolver used by the night watchmen are now preserved in the Boardroom, and there is a record of the form of guarantee signed by the sponsor of any person so employed. In the Belfast Museum there is a strong iron guard or cage into which a coffin could be fastened to prevent violation after burial, and which came from this graveyard. (Plate 10 (a)).

The Minutes of the Society for 31st December, 1836, mention an interesting sequel to the times of the body-snatchers :—

> "Dr. Drummond is permitted to have a single grave in the Paupers' ground for the interment of subjects granted to the Anatomical School according to the Act of Parliament."

Anatomy had been taught in the Academical Institution since 1818, but it was not until 1835 that a formal Medical School was opened, and Dr. James L. Drummond, a Physician to the Charitable Society, was elevated to the first Chair of Anatomy and Physiology, which he occupied for thirty years. He was the first President of the Faculty. He was also first President of the Belfast Natural History and Philosophical Society and President of the Literary Society.

There is a large unmarked plot in this cemetery connected with two events in social and medical history (Plate 11 (b)), for in it are buried victims of the great Cholera epidemic of 1832 and 1833, and it was afterwards used as a burying-ground for the poor in the crisis that followed the potato famine of 1845 and 1846.

"November, 1832 :—

> A very awful dispensation from the Supreme Disposer of events has taken place; and in the contemplated approach, and the actual arrival of the Epidemic Cholera in Belfast, many precautionary measures were taken generally, and in all public charitable establishments particularly, to avert, and arrest, with due submission to the will of God, the progress of the

impending evil. . . . Such has been the success of the unwearied perseverence and skill of the Physicians of Belfast, aided by the zeal, judgment and indefatigable exertions of the Board of Health, and by the liberality and co-operation of its patriotic inhabitants, depending always on the Divine blessing, that in the report of the Board of Health, November 12th, 1832, the number of deaths since the commencement of the disorder in Belfast were only 418, while the recoveries were 2409; total number of cases, 2827. This awful calamity appears now to have ceased. . . . There were only four victims to the Cholera in the Poor-House . . ."

In the summer of 1847, after the famine years, this same plot was reopened for the burial of the poor, and a certificate of freedom from infection in opening these graves was signed by many medical practitioners in the town. The annual report of that year adds :—

"Early in May, the infectious diseases had so alarmingly increased in town that, as soon as new hospital accommodation could be provided, the beds were filled, and more required. Under these circumstances, the hospital commitee applied to your Committee, to give room and beds to the surgical and other non-infectious cases, then in the surgical wards, in order that their beds might be made available for fever patients; and guaranteeing to pay all expenses. . . . Within the last fortnight these patients have again been taken back to the General Hospital. . . .

In the month of July, the influx of beggars and vagrants from the surrounding districts of Belfast, had become such a nuisance, and was considered by the Board of Health to exercise such a pernicious influence in propagating disease, that your Committee were induced, by urgent solicitation from that and other public bodies, to call a special meeting of this Society, at which it was resolved to put into activity their legal powers for suppressing street-begging, which had for many years lain dormant. . . ."

The Belfast Charitable Institution.

While the Poor Law Bill for Ireland was on its way through the House of Commons at Westminster in 1838, the President and Assistants became apprehensive that under one of its clauses their property could be taken from them and transferred to the Commissioners to be appointed under the new law. They accordingly prepared a Petition for presentation to Parliament for the introduction of an excluding clause, emphasising the special circumstances surrounding the establishment of the Society, and certain peculiar features such as leases to the Lying-In Hospital and the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the provision of a burying-ground in which plots were held by private individuals.

Their Petition

"Humbly Sheweth

That for the erection and support of the Poor-house . . . large sums of money were subscribed or bequeathed by various inhabitants of the town and others, under the full conviction, that their property, so subscribed or bequeathed, should remain inviolate under that management to which it had been confided, and which impression has been fully borne out by various Acts of Parliament."

The Secretary for Ireland gave an assurance that the necessary clause would be inserted, but when the time came, this was so modified as to raise doubts as to whether it would serve the purpose of the institution.

The Annual Report of 1841, however, states :—

> "It having been ascertained by the opinion of Council, that the New Poor Law does not interfere with the Belfast Charitable Society, the Committee turned their attention to the reduction of the number of inmates in the House, so as to make the expenditure not greater than the income of the Charity. To accomplish this, the Committee ceased admitting any more adults or children, while, at the same time, they reluctantly discharged from the house a number of adults, whose claims upon the Charity were the least strong and who were considered proper objects for the Work House.
>
> As soon as the inmates in the House are so far reduced in number as to leave a surplus of income over the expenditure, your Committee would recommend the admission of individuals who are natives of the town or parish, who have not been reduced to poverty by their own bad conduct or dissipation, and who do not belong to that class that are admissible into the Work House; so that, in a few years, the house will become an asylum for persons who had seen better days, and for whom the Charity was originally founded."

Although the Society had no longer to make provision for the pauper classes, the levy of a Poor Rate had an almost disastrous effect on its income, for people felt that once the State was making provision for the poor, there was no longer any need for voluntary effort. It was some years before the continuing need for the Charitable Society was realised by the public. With the coming of the Poor Law, the Poorhouse days were really over, and from that time on the House was more often referred to as the Charitable Institution. The wrought iron work over the gateway (Plate 6) is not old, but belongs to this period, and was put up as stated in a Minute of November, 1892 :—

> "For many years past the Institution has been very generally known as the 'Old Poor House', and the Committee thought that if the place were called by its proper name, an objection raised by some to seek its shelter might be removed. Over each gate has been erected an ornamental design bearing the words 'Belfast Charitable Society, 1771'."

This was a period of expansion, and the dreadful overcrowding was to occur no more. This was due, not so much to any increase in the Society's income, as to a number of special gifts. In utilising these gifts to the full, the Committee of those days seems to have lost nothing of the astuteness of their predecessors, for the report of 1862 records :—

> "In the report of last year it was stated that the late Lady Donegall had bequeathed an annuity to this Society of £100 annually, to commence after the payment of other objects, and to continue during the life of Lord Donegall. Under these circumstances, your Committee considered it expedient to insure the life of Lord Donegall for £500, and effected a policy for that amount."

It is pleasant to know that his Lordship survived for a further twenty-one years.

In 1868, the Charters Wing, the gift of Mr. John Charters, was opened at the rear of the original premises, and a few yards from it. This was allotted to the children, who were thenceforth segregated from the aged. Four years later, in 1872, the two Benn Wings, the gifts of Mr. Edward Benn, were built, and with additional corridors, welded the several parts into a convenient whole, very much increasing the roominess of the House. The present dining-room with its kitchens and sculleries was added in 1887.

The children did not occupy the Charters Wing long, for in 1879, a resolution was passed reserving the home for the aged and infirm exclusively. It is a curious coincidence that in this same year it was reported to the General Board,

> "Your Committee have been much gratified by the receipt of a letter from a young man, who was formerly maintained and educated in this Institution, enclosing a subscription of one guinea to the funds of the Society, and promising to contribute a similar amount annually. The letter also conveyed his grateful acknowledgment of many obligations to this Charity."

And the converse too has occurred. More than once in the history of the Society those who had been its Assistants in their days of prosperity have fallen on evil times, and have been offered and accepted the shelter of the House.

There is an interesting minute of November, 1892 :—

> "A Deputation from the Board of Management of the Royal Hospital attended and the question of the purchase of this Institution and grounds for the purpose of the Hospital was discussed.
>
> The Committee considered it would be a benefit to the town if such a sale were accomplished and agreed to recommend the Corporation to accept the sum of £35,450 for the House and grounds, and seven houses in North Queen Street, in all covering about 4 acres."

These negotiations were never carried through, for the new Royal Victoria Hospital was, in due course, built on the Grosvenor Road site.

The Building.

The House is not the oldest public building in Belfast. That distinction belongs to the Belfast Bank in Waring Street, formerly the Exchange. The Assembly Rooms, which saw the trial of Henry Joy McCracken, were on its first floor. Many of the early meetings of the Charitable Society were held here. It was built in 1769 by the first Marquis of Donegall at the "Four Corners," then one of the most important sites in Belfast, and the point from which all distances from the town were measured, as can be seen from old mile-posts. The building has been so altered both inside and out as no longer fully to deserve the consideration that would otherwise be its historical due.

Clifton House is recognised as being one of the finest examples of Georgian architecture in Belfast. The additions to the back have in no way altered the front elevation. The building is not large, but is of the most beautiful proportions, while the mellow colour of the old brickwork and its most careful pointing

are really lovely. It has been repeatedly stated that the central spire, which, the curious will be interested to know, is of Scottish stone, and cost £170. 15s. 0d., is a feature peculiar to Irish Georgian, and would be represented by a dome in the corresponding type of building in England.

It is not clear who was the architect. There were plans prepared by Mr. Myln of London and Mr. Haliday of Liverpool. A Scottish architect was also consulted for

> "Robert Thomson reported that He had advice from his friends in Glasgow that they have settled with the Person who drew the Plans of the Poor House and Infirmary for three guineas, and that he hath no further charge on that acct, but said 3 guineas & 3/8 postages."

Messrs. George Russell, Stafford Wilson and Foot appear to have submitted plans in Belfast. A Committee of five was appointed to consider these, and rejected all but three. On these three they could form no collective opinion, and each made his own report. From these a delightful probability emerges. Robert Thomson said,

> "There is yet another Plan which hath not been submitted to us as a Committee and of which therefore I shall say no more than that I would wish it laid before Mr. Cooley also, I have seen it in the hands of Mr. Robt. Joy."

William Baird, too, reported,

> "I have seen a Plan for the above purposes in the hands of Mr. Robt. Joy, which in my Judgment I would prefer."

And a third member, George Black wrote,

> ". . . some of my worthy Brethren . . . produced . . . Plans . . . And it is a pity they were not submited to public Inspection particularly the drawing of a respectable Brother who I am sorry to say declined showing it, even to the Committee as a body. . . . The front seems well calculated as a public Edifice."

Then the Committee

> "resolved that Mr. Robt. Joy be requested to take with him to Dublin the three plans now delivered in, & such other drawings as are now in his possession, and lay the same before Mr. Cooley, for his examination, with directions to choose out of those four the Plan which he shall most approve of . . ."

The Committee afterwards saw Robert Joy's plans and recommended their adoption to the General Board, a choice which was confirmed. In support of all this there is a paragraph in the poem of David Boyd, the schoolmaster :—

> "All labour'd freely in the bless'd employ,
> But the most active, Mr. Robert Joy;
> He took to Dublin with th'utmost respect,
> The various plans, the skilled architect
> Might one approve—the work of choosing past;
> His was the plan they voted best at last.
> Through the whole business still the active man;—
> Here stands the Poorhouse built on Robert's plan."

In short, as Mary Ann McCracken said at the beginning of the letter about her uncle, "He projected our 'Old Poorhouse'."

Perhaps this does not mean as much as might be thought at first sight, for long after the foundations were laid and the walls well up, the Committee were still watching every detail, and there are entries in the Minutes such as,

"Resolved that the pitch of the roof be forty degrees."

"Resolved that the stacks of Chimneys be carried up from above the roof agreeable to the model now made."

"Resolved that . . . the cupola be carried on this season agreeable to a model thereof made by Hugh Dunlap Carpenter . . ."

Family Connections With the Society.

It is remarkable how many families have served this old foundation for several generations. There were the two Valentine Joneses. There were many generations of Joys until quite recently. There have been from its earliest days and are at the present time members of the families of Brett and Dobbs. There have been several generations of Batt, Bristow, Bruce, Clarke, Pim, O'Brien, McNeill and Sinclair.

Two such family groups are specially interesting, the Donegall family and the Purdons.

The Donegall family have provided the Society with four Presidents covering a period of 165 years so far :—

Arthur Chichester, 1st Marquis - - -	1774-1799
George Augustus, 2nd Marquis - - -	1799-1844
George Hamilton, 3rd Marquis - - -	1844-1883

The 3rd Marquis was followed by three Mayors of Belfast, but he had left his Ulster estates to his daughter, Harriett, Countess of Shaftesbury, and her son, the 9th Earl of Shaftesbury, has been President since 1896.

And the Purdon family may well have established a record of medical service to one institution, for from Dr. Henry Purdon, who was Staff Surgeon to the Province of Ulster, and who attended the Poorhouse as early as 1804, the following line of Physicians to the House is descended :—

Dr. Thomas Henry Purdon - - - -	1836-1845
Dr. Charles Delacherois Purdon - - -	1845-1882
Dr. Henry Samuel Purdon - - - -	1882-1906
Dr. Richard J. Purdon - - - - -	1889-1918
Dr. Elias Bell Purdon - - - - - -	1918-1947

Clifton House.

To-day the Belfast Charitable Society provides a home for 144 aged men and women of good character who are natives of, or residents for some time in, Belfast. Under the terms of the Forster Green bequest of £10,000, a limited number of persons can be admitted from any part of the counties of Down and Antrim.

The name of the institution has been changed to Clifton House, and the residents use this address with greater freedom than the old one with its inevitable stigma.

A candidate, once admitted, has a home for life. Unless better treatment can be provided elsewhere, residents taken ill in the House are nursed on the premises, or, if transferred for treatment to another institution, are sure of their place in Clifton House when they are fit to be moved, even if chronically sick. It it occasionally necessary to transfer permanently anti-social cases of insanity.

The advanced age and corresponding frailty of those now seeking admission is a matter of some concern to the Committee, but as far as is possible with a small nursing staff, no deserving case is refused admission.

Residents have full liberty to come and go as they please within the limits of medical discretion, and are encouraged to take their holidays in the usual way if arrangements can be made for them.

The fit are accommodated in small rooms, mostly two-bedded. The less strong are in infirm wards where they can get breakfast in bed, but their other meals in the dining-room, while the most frail of all are, like the acutely ill, in the sick bay.

Each resident contributes what he or she can to their upkeep, but no one is refused admission for lack of means. Various Local Welfare Committees also make a contribution to the maintenance of people for whom they would otherwise have to make provision. Finance, however, is not so often as formerly the real problem for the applicant. These old people have in many cases outlived their own generation. Many of them have been living alone, and show signs of neglect and lack of supervision. All welcome the companionship of people of their own age in an atmosphere where the rate of living is more atuned to their physical strength.

Conclusion.

Belfast may well be proud of its oldest charity. In their lovely old Georgian building known first as the Poorhouse, then as the Charitable Instititution, and now as Clifton House, the President and Assistants of the Belfast Charitable Society have always pursued the policy that would best serve the needs of the community from time to time.

The Society has, as the Report of 1874 says,

> "an interesting and honourable history . . . . . It is a fine memorial of the men who laid the foundation of our local reputation and prosperity. Their honoured names could not have been inscribed on a worthier page of philanthropy.
>
> And it may well be desired that their benevolence, animating the successive generations of our people, may secure for this Institution a lasting prosperity, and for many a weary spirit, shaken by the storms of life, a haven of repose."

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